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ABSTRACT

Program requirements for a master's degree in education at both publicly and privately supported institutions are compared. Requirements are revealed as similar in both types of institution with some slight differences in emphasis. Publicly supported institutions appear to have more stringent requirements in the areas of full-time residency requirements, standardized test score requirements, minimum test score requirements, and acceptability of transfer credits. Private institutions appear to have more stringent requirements, maximum number of transfer credits allowed, fulfilling residency requirements during summer sessions, and maximum number of transfer credits allowed which were earned toward another degree. (JD)

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The Master's Degree in Education:

Comparing Public and Private Institutions

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Introduction

The vitality of an institution's graduate program is directly linked to that institution's responsiveness to the changing needs of its clientele and its concomitant responsibilities regarding accepted levels of professional standards.

Each institution has policies and procedures which are administered by the graduate dean in consultation with appropriate policy-recommending or policy-making bodies, i.e. the graduate council or the graduate faculty. These policies and procedures usually specify a route by which graduate students may petition for waivers of one or more program requirements.

When such requests for waivers appear in isolated instances, and compelling mitigating factors are present, graduate councils are likely to consider each case independently based upon its inherent characteristics.

However, when the number of requests for waivers of specific policies increases, graduate councils tend to look at these areas from a different perspective. For, the increased frequency of waiver requests might indicate that the policies under question may need to be re-examined.

The graduate council, in its deliberations regarding frequent student requests for waivers in specific policy areas, generally asks the graduate dean to gather data regarding established policies at similar institutions. Upon presentation of this data, the graduate council is better able to ascertain the level of consistency existing between its specific program criteria and generally accepted practices across a broader spectrum of higher education.

Of increasing graduate council concern are policies regarding full-time residency requirements for master's degree students, time limits for the

completion of degree requirements, the use of standardized test scores as admission criteria, and transfer of credit policies. This national survey was initiated to gather data in these areas in support of on-going program assessment.

Review of Selected Related Literature

This study focused only upon several of the many important variables which should be considered in the determination of graduate program quality. A review of recent literature proved to be somewhat fruitless in that very few studies have addressed the variables considered here on an aggregate basis. However, there have been many studies dealing with several of the issues specifically, such as the use of the Graduate Record Examination in the graduate admissions process (see Willingham, p. 15; Khoury, p. 101; Clark, p. 103-104; and Lynn, p. 9-10.), prediction of graduate school success based upon quantifiable indicators (Clark and Fantini, p. 7), qualitative ratings of institutional reputation based upon the subjective perspectives of the professoriate from specific disciplines, etc. (Clark, p. 214).

One study of particular interest which dealt with several of the issues under discussion, conducted by Lawrence H. Rice in 1973, was presented at the 14th annual meeting of the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States and was published in its proceedings. He observed, ". . . in analyzing graduate school regulations, I have concluded that they fall into three general categories: those which make sense and are readily defensible, those which appear to make sense but may or may not when challenged, and those which made sense at one time but no longer make any sense." (p. 103)..

The data of his study were gathered from the graduate bulletins of 38 universities ranging in size from New Mexico Highlands University with an enrollment of approximately 2500 to the University of Arizona with an enrollment in excess of 27,000 students. Geographic distribution ranged from Vermont to California and from Alaska to Florida. Among other things, he found that 84 percent of the surveyed institutions exhibited specific requirements for admission to any and all programs. He also found that 25 of the institutions (71 percent) have minimum grade point standards for admission. These standards range from a low of 2.0 in undergraduate work to a high of 3.0 in upper division undergraduate study. Several institutions indicated that no formal grade point minimums were applicable and applied such measures as upper-half of the graduating class, letters of recommendation, records which indicate success, etc. The study also dealt with the role that the Graduate Record Examination scores play in graduate admissions. He indicated that it is uncommon for graduate schools to stipulate minimum G.R.E. achievement since only 5 of the 38 surveyed institutions did so. Curiously, only 3 of the institutions required the advanced test prior to admission. However, he mentions that the G.R.E. is used as some gauge of ability in 33 of the institutions, frequently as a requirement to degree candidacy. He also indicated that there is a widely held opinion regarding the time limit in which a student must complete degree requirements. Of the 38 schools surveyed, 37 stated specific time limits for completion of the master's degree as follows: 1 institution requiring the degree to be completed in 3 years; 1 institution requiring that the degree be completed within 4 years; 8 institutions which require completion within 5 years; 16 institutions which require completion within 6 years; 8 institutions which require completion within 7 years; and 3 institutions which require completion within 8 years.

In addition, one institution had a scheme which required full-time students to finish the master's degree in 3 years, part-time students to finish in 5 years, evenings-only students to finish in 5 years, and summers-only students to finish in 7 years.

Concerning the matter of transfer credit, Dr. Rice indicated that all 38 surveyed schools allow graduate transfer credits. Sixty percent of the institutions permitted transfer of no more than 6 semester hours of credit; 6 allowed transfer of 9 credits; 4 permitted 12; and 1 permitted as many as 15. He also found that B or higher grades were universally required in transfer policies. His study considered the use of the word "candidacy" at the various institutions and included an explanation of several different grading systems operant in the surveyed graduate institutions.

Literature dealing with the issue of residency requirements addresses the special needs of in-service professionals taking coursework on a primarily part-time basis (Ervin, p. 137; McCoy, p. 29). These students (in 1972) amounted to over 63 percent of the entire graduate student population in the United States. A specific example (Fullerton, p. 116) is the MBA program at San Jose State University where over 60 percent of those who completed degree requirements in a recent year did so with coursework taken entirely in the late afternoons and evenings because most students were fully employed.

The special needs of practicing professionals, it was felt, should be taken into account when graduate programs are reviewed in relation to their differing purposes (Clark, p. 213-214).

Giles T. Brown (p. 232-233) on this subject stated that since part-time students enrolled in master's programs represent a higher proportion than those in doctoral programs, this poses some unique problems and challenges in the assessment of quality of programs on the master's level.

The significance of time limits for the completion of degree requirements is expressed as a criterion of degree quality (Brown, p. 233) but this significance seems to be tempered by summary data from graduate catalogs which indicate that time limits are being lessened in response to the needs of "an increasingly mobile and part-time student body." (Sparks, 1976, p. 17).

Although the residency requirement is often stated in terms of time, it is very often described in terms of the amount of credit taken during a specific time span (Sparks, 1976, p. 16). The concepts of residency, time limit for completion of the degree, and age of credit earned, all appear to be interrelated as evidenced by Sparks, (1974, p. 207) who stated that ". . . Many of us now require that the credit (we accept in transfer) be no older than that we accept for degree credit from our own students." He further reinforced this position in his 1976 presentation to the Council of Graduate Schools (p. 17).

Continuing progress toward establishing criteria for the assessment of quality of the master's degree is being made by a task force commissioned by the Council of Graduate Schools in the U.S. The reader is encouraged to consult members of CGS or, more specifically, task force members for detailed information (for example, see Ryan, p. 5).

Selection of the Population

All publicly-supported and privately-supported master's degree granting institutions in the United States enrolling fewer than 10,000 students as listed in Graduate Programs and Admissions Manual 1977-1979 (Volume D. Social Sciences and Education, published by the Graduate Record Examinations Board in consultation with the Council of Graduate Schools in the U.S.) were polled.

Three hundred one institutions (135 public and 166 private) were sent a one-page form eliciting responses in 6 areas.

A total of 232 responses (111 public and 121 private) from institutions located in 44 states and the District of Columbia were received resulting in an overall response rate of over 77 percent (82 percent public and 73 percent private).

Summary of Findings

1) Master's degree in education students at 77 (33 percent) of the responding institutions (36 percent public and 27 percent private) must fulfill a residency requirement during which they must enroll as full-time students. Of the 77 institutions indicating a residency requirement, 62 (81 percent) indicated that this requirement could be satisfied during a summer session.
2) Two hundred twenty-two (96 percent) of the responding institutions (99 percent public and 93 percent private) indicated that master's degree in education students must fulfill degree requirements within a specified time limit. Responses ranged from 3 years to 10 years with a mean of 5.9 years (6.2 years for public and 5.7 years for private) and a mode (102 institutions) of 6 years.
3) One hundred forty-nine (64 percent) of the responding institutions require students to submit standardized test scores for regular admission to master's degree in education programs.

   Of these 149 institutions requiring standardized test scores; 52 (35 percent) require the Graduate Record Exam--Aptitude only; 27 (18 percent) require the Miller Analogies Test only; 22 (15 percent) will accept <u>either</u> the Graduate Record Exam--Aptitude <u>or</u> the Miller Analogies Test; 15 (10

percent) require the Graduate Record Exam and the Miller Analogies Test; and 17 (11 percent) will accept the Graduate Record Exam or the Miller Analogies Test or some other standardized test (usually the National Teacher's Exam).

4) Minimum scores on standardized tests for admission to master's degree in education programs are required at 71 (31 percent) of the responding institutions (36 percent public and 26 percent private).

Minimum required scores ranged from 600 to 1100 (combined scores) on the Graduate Record Exam--Aptitude (verbal and quantitative) and from 22 to 50 (raw scores) on the Miller Analogies Test.

Some institutions expressed minimum requirements in terms of percentiles on the various standardized tests. Also, several institutions indicated that standardized test scores are not required unless students' undergraduate grade point averages are below specified minimums (usually 2.50 on a 4 point scale).

5) Two hundred twenty-eight (98 percent) of the responding institutions (100 percent public and 97 percent private) accept transfer credits toward the master's degree in education. Responses ranged from a low of 4 semester hours of transfer credit to a high of 20 (50 percent of a 40 semester hour program) with a mean of 8 semester hours. Two institutions accept 4 semester hours of transfer credit; none accepts 5 semester hours; 102 accept 6 semester hours; 3 accept 7 semester hours; 27 accept 8 semester hours; 41 accept 9 semester hours; and 46 accept 10 or more semester hours of credit. Several institutions indicate variable amounts of transfer credit depending upon the total number of credits required to complete a program, or because of the lack of an established policy in this area.

6) Graduate credits earned toward another master's degree are acceptable as transfer credit at 104 (45 percent) of the responding institutions. At these 104 institutions the number of acceptable transfer credits which were earned toward another degree ranges from 4 to 15 semester hours with a mean of 8.2 semester hours of credit.

Conclusions

Residency Requirements

Approximately 64 percent of responding public institutions and 73 percent of responding private institutions indicated that they do not require students to complete a portion of their degree while enrolled as full-time students. (Institutions requiring full-time attendance were not asked to specify the semester-hour course load required for classification as a full-time student.)

Since 90 percent of the public institutions and 79 percent of the private institutions with residency requirements indicated that this requirement could be satisfied during a summer session, it was inferred that this policy is somewhat flexible and is designed to meet the needs of in-service teachers who are able to enroll in summer coursework on an intensified basis.

On the basis of the data presented above, it appears that publicly-supported institutions are more likely to require master's degree in education students to complete a portion of their degree while enrolled as full-time students. Privately-supported institutions are less likely to allow master's degree in education students to satisfy residency requirements during a summer session.

Time Limits

Nearly every publicly-supported institution (99 percent) and the vast majority of privately-supported institutions (93 percent) indicated that degree requirements must be completed within a specified time frame. The mean time limit for public institutions was 6.2 years while the mean time limit for private institutions was 5.7 years.

It is interesting to note that institutions not having residency requirements (64 percent public vs. 73 percent private) might be expected to allow a longer period of time for the completion of the degree, and concomitantly, that a shorter time frame might be expected at those 73 institutions with residency requirements. However, such was not the case. The average time limit in both cases for publicly-supported institutions was 6.2 years and the average time limit in both cases for privately-supported institutions was 5.7 years and 5.9 years respectively. This leads one to infer that no significant relationship exists between residency requirements and time allowed for the completion of the degree.

Also, it was found that those 11 institutions (4 public vs. 7 private) which maintain residency requirements but do not allow these requirements to be met during the summer have an average time limit of 5.9 years (5.8 years for public vs. 6.0 years for private) when specified.

On the basis of the data presented above, it appears that a slightly greater proportion of publicly-supported institutions required that master's degree in education students complete degree requirements within a specified time period. However, privately-supported institutions when taken as a group require that degree requirements be completed within a shorter period of time (6.2 years for public institutions vs. 5.7 years for private institutions).

Standardized Test Score Submission

Seventy-three percent of the responding public institutions and 56 percent of the responding private institutions indicated that master's degree in education students are required to submit the results of a standardized test.

Of those public institutions with such a requirement, 70 percent specified which test results are required and the remaining 30 percent indicated that the results of any one of several standardized tests were acceptable.

Of the private institutions with such a requirement, 78 percent specified which test results are required and the remaining 22 percent indicated that the results of any one of several standardized tests were acceptable.

The Graduate Record Examination--Aptitude is required or acceptable at 85 percent of the responding public institutions and at 74 percent of the responding private institutions. Forty-nine percent of the responding public institutions and 63 percent of the responding private institutions indicated that the Miller Analogies Test was either required or acceptable.

Based upon the information presented above, it appears that a substantially higher proportion of responding public institutions (73 percent public vs. 56 percent private) require that master's degree in education students submit the results of standardized test scores for admission. Of those institutions requiring standardized test scores, the Graduate Record Examination--Aptitude is required or acceptable at a substantially higher proportion of institutions than the Miller Analogies Test (80 percent GRE vs. 56 percent MAT).

Publicly-supported institutions appear to clearly prefer the results of the Graduate Record Examination to the Miller Analogies Test (85 percent require or will accept the GRE, while 49 percent require or will accept the MAT). On the other hand, privately-supported institutions appear to be less definitive in this regard as 74 percent require or will accept the GRE, while

63 percent require or will accept the MAT. (A considerable proportion, 15 percent in each case, of both public and private institutions will accept either the GRE--Aptitude or the MAT.)

It was also found that private institutions not requiring standardized test score submission are far less likely to have residency requirements when compared to public institutions not requiring test scores. (Thirty-one percent private vs. 16 percent public do not require a full-time residency period.)

Standardized Test Score Minimums

Minimum scores on standardized tests are required for admission at 36 percent of the responding public institutions and 26 percent of the responding private institutions thus indicating that 51 percent of publicly-supported and 54 percent of privately-supported institutions requiring standardized test scores for admission have not specified a minimum achievement level on the tests. Therefore, 64 percent of the public and 74 percent of the private institutions either do not require test results at all or do not require minimum scores if test results are required.

Minimum required scores ranged from a low of 600 to a high of 1100 (combined verbal and quantitative scores on the GRE--Aptitude) and from 22 to 50 (raw scores) on the MAT. It is obvious that those institutions requiring very low standardized test score minimums are doing so only as a formality since 92 percent of all students taking the GRE--Aptitude Test score above the 600-level and nearly 90 percent of all students taking the MAT score above a raw score of 22.

The ranges of required minimums were found to be comparable at public and private institutions. On the GRE--Aptitude, minimums ranged from 600 to 1000 (combined scores) at public institutions, and from 600 to 1100 (combined scores) at private institutions. On the Miller Analogies Test

minimums ranged from 22 to 40 (raw scores) at public institutions and from 30 to 50 at private institutions.

It should be noted that it is nearly twice as likely in the public sector and three times as likely in the private sector that institutions not requiring standardized test score minimums for admission also do not have residency requirements.

Transfer of Credit Policies

Almost every public and private institution responding to the survey (over 98 percent combined) indicated that appropriate transfer credits toward the master's degree in education were acceptable. Policies at public institutions ranged from a low of 6 semester hours to a high of 20 (50 percent of a 40-hour program) semester hours with an average maximum of 9 accepted as transfer credit. At private institutions, policies ranged from a low of 4 semester hours to a high of 12 semester hours with an average maximum of 7 semester hours accepted as transfer credit.

No substantive differences existed in either the public or private sector between those institutions requiring minimum standardized test scores and those with no standardized test score minimums.

Considerable differences do exist, however, between public institutions requiring the submission of standardized test scores (8.5 semester hour average) and those not requiring the submission of scores (9.6 semester hour average). On the other hand, in this regard no substantive differences exist in the private sector (7.1 semester hour average vs. 6.9 semester hour average).

Also, note-worthy differences do exist between public institutions with residency requirements (8.3 semester hour average) and those without residency requirements (9.0 semester hour average). On the other hand, in this regard no substantive differences exist in the private sector (7.3 semester hour

average vs. 7.0 semester hour average.)

Thus, it may be inferred that those public institutions without residency requirements and/or not requiring the submission of standardized test scores are more likely to accept a greater number of transfer credits. Also, it may be inferred that transfer of credit policies within private institutions are not related to the aforementioned factors when aggregate data are considered.

Graduate credits earned toward another master's degree were acceptable as transfer credit at 40 percent of the responding public institutions and 50 percent of the responding private institutions. The number of transfer credits ranged from 6 to 15 with a mean of 9 semester hours at public institutions, and from 4 to 15 with a mean of 7.6 semester hours at private institutions.

It was also found that in both publicly-supported and privately-supported institutions, those accepting graduate credits earned toward another degree as transfer credit are not likely to maintain residency requirements.

Summary

Taken individually, master's degree in education requirements at both publicly and privately-supported institutions reflect a range that spans programs having virtually no requirements in the areas under consideration to those which maintain very detailed and somewhat stringent requirements.

When taken collectively, however, program requirements at public and private institutions are remarkably similar as evidenced by the comparative data presented in graphic form in Appendix A.

Publicly-supported institutions appear to have more stringent requirements in the areas of full-time residency requirements, standardized test

score submission requirements, minimum test score requirements, and acceptability of transfer credits which were earned toward another degree.

Private institutions appear to have more stringent requirements in the areas of amount of time allowed to complete degree requirements, maximum number of transfer credits allowed, fulfilling residency requirements during summer sessions, and maximum number of transfer credits allowed which were earned toward another degree.

Of special note are the interrelationships between the various areas under consideration. For example, it was found that private institutions not requiring standardized test scores are far less likely to have residency requirements when compared to public institutions not requiring test scores. Also, it was found that it is nearly twice as likely in the public sector and three times as likely in the private sector that institutions not requiring standardized test score minimums also do not have residency requirements; that in both publicly and privately-supported institutions, those accepting graduate credits (earned toward another degree) as transfer credit are not likely to maintain residency requirements; that those public institutions without residency requirements and/or not requiring the submission of standardized test scores are more likely to accept a greater number of transfer credits; and that transfer of credit policies within private institutions are not related to the submission of test score requirements when aggregate data are considered.

Finally, it should be understood that this study focused only upon several of the many important variables which should be considered in the determination of graduate program quality. No value judgments on program quality in either the public or private sector on an individual or aggregate basis are implied. The reader is invited to contact the author for further information.

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Appendix A — Data Summary

1) Must master's degree in education candidates at your institution fulfill a residency requirement during which they must enroll as full-time students?

	yes	no
Public:	49 (36%)	71 (64%)
Private:	33 (27%)	88 (73%)

If yes, may this requirement be satisfied during a summer session?

	yes	no
Public:	36 (90%)	4 (10%)
Private:	26 (79%)	7 (21%)

2) Must master's degree in education candidates at your institution fulfill degree requirements within a specified time limit?

	yes	no
Public:	110 (99%)	1 (1%)
Private:	112 (93%)	9 (7%)

If yes, how long?

Public:	6.2 years (ave.)
Private:	5.7 years (ave.)

3) For regular admission to master's degree in education programs at your institution, are students required to submit standardized test scores?

	yes	no
Public:	81 (73%)	30 (27%)
Private:	68 (56%)	53 (44%)

4) For regular admission to master's degree in education programs at your institution, are minimum scores required on a standardized test?

	yes	no
Public:	40 (36%)	71 (64%)
Private:	31 (26%)	90 (74%)

5) Maximum number of transfer credits accepted toward a master's degree in education at your institution?

Public:	9 semester hours (ave.)
Private:	7 semester hours (ave.)

6) Are graduate credits earned toward another master's degree acceptable as transfer credits toward a second master' degree?

	yes	no
Public:	44 (40%)	67 (60%)
Private:	60 (50%)	61 (50%)

If yes, maximum number of transfer credits?

Public:	9 semester hours (ave.)
Private:	7.6 semester hours (ave.)